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SERMON X.

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THE LONELINESS OF GUILT.

"A FUGITIVE and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."—GENESIS 4: 12.

SUCH was the doom of Cain for having imbrued his hands in his brother's blood. He was not put to death. Though his life was justly forfeited, yet the Judge would not suffer it to be touched. "The Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." His only punishment was to be expelled from human society. As he had killed his brother, he should never again know the delights of domestic affection. Henceforth he should be a lonely man, wandering over the inhospitable earth, silent and gloomy, unrecognized by human beings, disowned even by his parents, and forsaken by God. "A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

This signal example of retribution I have chosen to illustrate

one general effect of all wrong-doing: which is, to cut off the offender, not only from God's favor, but from human friendship and society; to fix "a great gulf," not only between man and his Maker, but between the guilty being and his own race and kindred.

All see the truth of this in the case of one who, like Cain, has committed a great crime. The more violent the deed, the more intense the horror for its perpetrator. Men stand aghast at such atrocity, and every feeling of pity is lost in indignation. The criminal has attacked society and placed himself out of the pale of its protection. Instantly its forces are armed to pursue him, and bring him to punishment. He is obliged to make his escape—to flee from his country—and to go forth, like the first murderer, a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth.

From the beginning of the world such has been the fate of men of violence and blood. All along through history do we see these wandering Cains and Ishmaels, whose hands are against every man, and every man's hand against them; and whose untamable fierceness renders them outlaws every where on the face of the earth. So was it in the beginning—so is it now. He who aims to destroy can not dwell at peace among men.

But it is not merely the detected criminal, pursued by officers of justice, with the bloodhounds of the law in full cry upon his track, who is obliged to separate himself from human society. He, too, who is yet undiscovered, but who carries in his breast the knowledge of some fearful deed, is compelled by that secret burden to stand apart from his fellow-men. The consciousness of guilt makes him shy and suspicious. He keeps aloof, and leads a solitary life. He walks with his head bowed down like a bulrush, afraid to look up lest men should read in his terrified countenance the dreadful secret of his soul.

Often this uneasiness at the heart drives a man into voluntary exile. By incessant motion of body he hopes to distract and relieve the torture of his mind. And so he roves from land to land, haunted and driven on by evil thoughts, seeking rest and finding none.

Nay, even to meditate a crime, to harbor a design of wrong, makes a man draw back from too great intimacy with others. The first breeding of villainy must be in the deepest darkness of the mind. When a man begins to deal in plots and conspiracies, he silently draws apart. He shrinks from the unreserved intimacies of friendship. He recoils from expressions of confidence, which may betray him into a disclosure of what is passing within. To keep his designs beyond discovery, he grows reserved and taciturn, sparing of his words, and even studies an impassible countenance, that his face may be a blank which no man can read. Thus guilt is always secretive and solitary. With none can it share its confidence; to none can it open its heart.

Could the history be written of those criminal enterprises which shock the world, it would be found that the beginning of crime was marked by an increased tendency to reserve and isolation. Often, after the deed is done, friends look back and remember that for a long time there had been something strange about the man—an absence of mind—an avoiding of society—which they could not explain. He was alone even in the bosom of his family. He would sit by his own fireside for hours without speaking; hardly taking his child upon his knee, or returning the kiss which was a token of the innocence which was gone from him forever. The guilty purpose within forbade all such communion, even with those who loved him but too well.

* But these examples, though they illustrate truly the secret and solitary nature of guilt, are not the examples which we need now. Our object is not to depict the remorse and despair of great offenders against society, but to illustrate one effect of all selfishness and sin, and that chiefly as shown in common life and in familiar characters. Ordinarily it does not go to the extent of criminal acts, or even criminal intentions. It does not compromise itself by such dangers. Yet in the habit of the mind is the seed which brings forth this bitter fruit. Selfishness can only live in secrecy. A man whose aims are pure and noble is open as the day. But he who has a personal object in all he does, is shy and scheming. Smooth and plausible in exterior, he has always a purpose to serve which does not appear; but which silently works within him to dissolve the bond of affection, which unites him to his brother. When this cold and calculating temper betrays itself, then farewell to friendship. The trait which most completely divides man from man, is not a burst of anger which, though it may part friends to-day, leaves them to come together again to-morrow, but rather want of truth and sincerity which, once discovered, divides them for years, or forever.

The first act which makes you shrink from an associate, is that which reveals a false heart underneath professions of regard. When you first detect this in some slight thing, a tone of the voice, or a glance of the eye, you start back as from the tongue of an adder. Let a man but once deceive you or betray you, and nothing can ever remove the impression of that sudden revelation of character. You may not come to an open rupture. Circumstances may compel you to keep up a show of friendship. Ties of blood may hold you fast, or business relations may force you into contact, but confidence is destroyed, and with it the old feeling of love is gone forever. You can not love one whom you can not trust.

Such is the judgment of God upon this kind of human baseness. A wily, crafty nature, practiced in all forms of deceit, slippery in its promises, cunning and plausible, but false and treacher-

ous, is thereby separated from all frank, confiding intercourse, and from hearty, unreserved affection. Upon a nature so mean and abject rests the curse pronounced upon the serpent: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life."

But it would not be fair, in a general argument, to take illustrations only from base and ignoble characters. It were a poor triumph obtained over such low and abject forms of sin, which even the world regards with scorn. Rather let us take characters which in its esteem are high and honorable. Here is one who is the very opposite of a false and deceitful nature, but who is the incarnation of Pride. Behold the man, not servile and creeping, but erect, with an air which seems to disdain the opinion of his fellows. Him the world judges not with scorn, but rather bows to with respectful deference. These are no vulgar sinners,

"They are all honorable men."

And yet not hypocrisy itself could more effectually destroy friendship than this cold, haughty, imperious pride. Falsehood undermines confidence, but pride destroys sympathy. It may be connected with no immorality. He who has it may be a man of outward respectability and unimpeached integrity, pure as a mountain of ice, but as cold. The man has but one defect—he has no heart.

Such men are not rare; men who seem to have been born "without natural affection." But one feeling possesses them, unbounded pride, a sense of personal importance which overtops every thing. It is of the nature of this feeling to lead a man to keep apart. It dilates and magnifies his little self and lifts him up quite above the level of humanity. No tie of sympathy connects him with common flesh and blood. No generous impulse ever throbs in his breast or flits across his passionless countenance. No tear of pity ever fills his eye.

Thus pride surrounds a man with an icy coldness, a freezing reserve, which chills and repels human intercourse. It does not tear men violently asunder, but it silently dissolves their connection. Men retire from him who scorns their fellowship. As it is his effort to place himself on a pinnacle above his fellow-mortals, it is but natural that they leave him on his lonely height, until he dies wretchedly, weary of his proud eminence.

If such colossal pride seems exceptional, take a more common passion, sordid Avarice, and mark how it tends to the same isolation. The very nature of this selfish instinct is a propensity to separate its interests from those of others, and to substitute cold calculation for the warm impulses of friendship and generosity. The noble spirit of humanity makes all things common. The in

terests of others are its own. It divides and distributes on every hand. But the miserly soul contracts within itself, until it becomes encased in adamant.

This isolation is a gradual thing—the result of a long process of separation. Pride and selfishness in some degree are born in all men. But how modified by fortune, position, or worldly success! Pride is crushed by abject poverty, by misfortune and sorrow, and it is inflated by prosperity.

There is nothing more instructive than to study human character as modified by different positions in life, and by prosperous or adverse fortune. Thus we may trace the progress of that gradual isolation which begins with the first selfish act, and which grows with habit and with time.

A young man enters upon life poor, but generous; poor in money, but rich in heart. His own struggles teach him sympathy with others. But the slow toil of acquisition awakens a selfish instinct. He begins to look upon his personal interest as something apart from that of his neighbors. He and they are not members of one body, but rival contestants for a prize. He retires into himself, and looks around with a cautious and wary eye. No longer eager to befriend and aid, he now watches others but to see what he can make out of them.

Thus with the first act of deliberate selfishness, not of fraud, but of overreaching another, there commences a process of separation which goes on for years. The breach grows wider as life advances. Jealousy and suspicion come in to increase the distance, till early friends are sundered apart as far as the east is from the west.

Thus the warm blood of youth freezes. The finer soul is chilled. The heart contracts, and its sensibilities wither and drop off. Those delicate tendrils that reached forth to other branches of the human family, and which the wail of sorrow, the sighing of grief, caused to quiver and tremble, are rudely torn away. Nothing remains but a cold, hard man, selfish and solitary.

Sad and melancholy change! Truly, the last state of that man is worse than the first. Here is a nature born with better impulses, spoiled by prosperity. How bright was the promise of life's morning, when the young heart opened to love, and the world was all before it where to choose objects of affection. Those were happy days. But the world has spoiled the nature formed for happiness. It dispels the illusions of the imagination, introducing only hard, cold reality. The poetry of life is gone. Vanished is youth's happy dream,

“At length he sees it fade away,
And melt into the light of common day.”

Could a man but foresee that such would be the effect of prosperity upon him, well might he deprecate it as the greatest calamity. Rather might he welcome poverty, the hardy nurse of many virtues and of purest happiness. Welcome those united struggles which so endear to each other the members of a family. Welcome to manly toil and honest friendship, instead of this dry, sapless, mercenary existence.

Sometimes this selfishness takes a more decided and pronounced character. It is not rare for a man who has grown rich suddenly to come to the determination to shake off a host of poor friends, who are in some degree dependent upon him for assistance. He says: "Let every one take care of himself, and not apply to others for aid." He did not reason so when *he* was poor and struggling. Then he was anxious to make favor with every body. And perhaps he would see things in a different light if he were again to become suddenly poor. But for the present he has no favors to ask, and the rule is a convenient one. He declares that he is worried to death with charitable societies and poor relations, till at last he forms the stern resolution to cut loose from the whole. He hardens his face like a flint, and meets every call with a gruff and determined, No! At length his troubles cease. His character becomes understood, and no one applies to him any more. God gives him up to his own selfishness.

But this man soon finds that what he most desired is a judgment and a curse. He wished men would let him alone; and accordingly they do leave him to himself. They take pains not to intrude upon his presence, and will even cross the street to avoid him. At length he begins to be annoyed by their neglect more than he was by their intrusions. No one would do him the least injury. But all shun his society. As the crowds pass his door, he may hear from his window frequent mutters about the miserly old wretch that can not die too soon. He begins to think that he would give a portion of his fortune to have somebody to love him and to speak well of him. He really wishes that some family in distress, or a young man just starting in business, or an orphan boy who wishes to get an education, would apply to him for assistance. But no; they would as soon ask mercy of the plague.

Perchance the rich man builds a great house as an offering to pride. But how cheerless its aspect. How cold the stones look! You enter this mansion, and all within is silent as the grave. No merry laugh of children is heard there. No happy little beings climb upon this man's knee, and make his heart young again with their smiles. There is a chilliness in the very atmosphere of the house. You can not breathe freely till you are out once more in the open and sunny street. Such is the desolation which reigns around a cold and selfish heart.

By such examples do we illustrate the isolating and repelling power of sin. Here are characters not rare in any community, and not by any means the outcasts of society, not fugitives and vagabonds, not outlaws and exiles, but men of high standing and "respectability," who dwell in the midst of crowded cities, and to whom the world looks up as its rich and great ones; and yet who for all sympathy and friendship are as solitary as if they were proscribed malefactors. No prison confines them, but dark, frowning passions, harder to break than walls of stone or bars of iron. A heart deeper and colder than any dungeon shuts them up in a dreary and hopeless solitude.

This isolation becomes more painful as the rich man grows old. As the winter of age comes on, he finds that he no longer attracts society that once was fascinated by his youthful spirit. His conversation has lost its vivacity. How soothing to an old man then to be surrounded by affectionate and grateful children. Their tears, and prayers, and blessings soothe the bitterness of death. But this man is waited on only by expectants. He has to buy the smallest favor. How gloomy is his death-bed. No real mourner watches there; none but heirs, impatient to have him gone.

O rich man! beware how you say, I will give no more; I will shut up all my sympathies in my own bosom, and let others take care of themselves. Once stop the springs of benevolence and they will stagnate and putrefy within you.

Wealth is a great gift. God has bestowed it upon you that you might be the minister of his providence. Every increase of fortune ought to be marked by an increase of magnanimity. You have that in your hands which may make a thousand hearts light and happy. Keep your breast full of warm impulses and generous sympathies, and you will multiply your enjoyment a thousand fold. God is the most happy of beings because he is the most generous. Give as God gives, freely, and you will taste something of the happiness of his ever-blessed mind.

Would that young men just embarking in a career of business might take warning from these examples of splendid wretchedness. They may be found by hundreds in every large city; and it may be a useful lesson to mark how completely a heartless and selfish life has alienated from them all love, honor, and respect.

But is there no exception to this law? Is it the effect of all moral obliquity to drive a man's friends away from him, and leave him deserted and desolate? Certainly there are forms of sin less repulsive than others; some even which at first sight have the aspect of virtue, which men honor and admire. Such is Ambition, "the last infirmity of noble minds." When united with genius, as it often is, it dazzles the world and inspires enthusiasm. Men run after it, and worship it. But unless joined with some nobler

qualities, this can not last long. Even genius can not make selfishness respectable. It is impossible to sustain enthusiasm for a thoroughly selfish man. No brilliancy of talent can make up for the want of heart or of moral feeling. The lack of principle or honor checks the rising murmurs of applause. When men discover that high talents are subordinate to personal interest; that the ambitious man labors, not for his country or mankind, but for his own advancement; when they see that he makes a god of himself, and that he values other men but as tools and instruments of his elevation, they draw back. They see how unscrupulous is this passion. It is selfish even to extermination, adding field to field, till it be left alone in the earth. When men see this, they stand aloof. They are not quite willing to be sacrificed to this divinity. Enthusiasm cools and slowly turns to disgust and aversion. Then ambition holds its mastery only by the power of success. As long as one is triumphant, men will flatter and court the rising power, yet in their hearts will they cherish a secret hatred, and the first sign of its overthrow will be hailed with an universal shout of exultation.

Such is the bitter fruit of that selfish ambition, which pushes its way through the crowd, eager to leave its fellows behind. How often in the race does it outrun affection and happiness, and attain power only to be hated and feared! It is for this reason that men who occupy high places are often the most miserable wretches. They have climbed the mountain-peak, and find it cold and dreary. Something is wanting there which power alone can not give. It may overawe discontent, and silence censure, and even buy applause. But one thing it can not command—true love and respect, that homage of the good, which is as the voice of God.

But what then? He who has absolute power, if he can not excite enthusiasm, is he not strong enough to do without it? So he may flatter himself. A ruler, intoxicated with dominion, may defy the world, saying with Cæsar: "I do not care to be loved, if only I am feared!" False and foolish boast! No king is mighty enough to stand unmoved the silent reprobation of mankind. Cold, chilling winds will sometimes sweep upward from the vale below, even to the summit of power, making him feel that it is a barren and worthless elevation.

The greatest man on earth, after all, is but a man, and must sometimes feel the wants of a man—the want of friendship and love. The Sicilian tyrant, who ordered two friends to execution was struck with amazement at their devotion to each other, and confessed aloud that they were richer and happier in their love than he upon his throne.

There is another drawback to the triumph of ambition. Power, not founded on justice and affection, is never secure. Thus the presumption of pride prepares its own overthrow, while it leaves the dethroned idol without support in the sympathy of mankind.

But it is the boast of a proud spirit that it can bear up under any reverses. It is sufficient to itself:

"What matter where, if I be still the same?"

Thus does the fallen hero try to deceive himself. But was there ever a man who did not feel keenly when he saw himself deserted by former friends? No man is so great as to be above the opinion of his fellow-creatures. He may be too proud to ask for affection. He may spurn sympathy; but he does care for homage and respect, and does not willingly submit to be despised or forgotten.

Those who declare most loudly their indifference to the opinion of mankind, are commonly disappointed actors on the stage of life. Byron was never weary of pouring out his contempt upon men. But the bitterness with which he spoke betrayed him. It showed but too well how keenly he felt their neglect and their just moral reprobation.

If ever there was a man who could afford to scorn the world, to look down with contempt on the opinions of mankind, certainly it was Napoleon, the most successful man of modern times. Such a man, after a life of triumphs, we should think, could preserve, even in defeat and exile, the spirit of his former days—a lofty and unconquered mind. But the history of that banishment tells us that he suffered bitterly under his humiliation. He, who once stood so high, now to be sunk so low! He never forgave Europe for being able to get along without him. And however grand may seem the figure of the exile of St. Helena, standing on the cliffs and looking off upon the sea, in his soul he was unspeakably lonely and wretched.

No man can sustain such an overthrow who is not supported by the consciousness of a noble life. A patriot, who had sacrificed himself for his country, might indeed bear exile or captivity, knowing that he was followed by the tears and prayers of millions. But one who has lived only for himself, and who would have the whole world fall down and worship him, can not bear to be deserted and left alone to die.

Thus we have observed the effect of the selfish passions in isolating a man from his fellow-beings. We trace the poison working in the veins, and mark how it curdles up the blood and chills the very life. We see it leading him to withdraw from his kind, at once shunning and repelling friendly intercourse, until he stands alone in gloomy isolation. We see how these manifestations of nature destroy confidence, and lower respect, and render enthusiasm impossible; how they chill the gush of affection; how they surround even prosperous men with a circle of suspicion and dislike; and at length compel those who would be friends to leave them alone in their misery and their pride.

These illustrations might be carried to any extent. What is true of falsehood and of pride, of avarice and ambition, is true of a hundred other vices of the human character—of envy, and jealousy, and ingratitude, and every kind of baseness. All tend to impair trust, and to diminish esteem, and to kill affection, and finally leave him who betrays such traits in a state of complete desertion, forsaken and despised of all mankind.

Such is the inevitable effect of moral evil. All sin is a corruption of the heart. In its essence it is nothing more nor less than intense selfishness. And this implies a decay of every nobler sentiment and feeling. It is a rotting away of all greatness and generosity of nature till the broad and brawny breast is but the arched vault of a sepulcher. It rings hollow. All beneath is death. To love such a being, a man without a heart, is as impossible as to love a marble sarcophagus filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

The design of this argument is wholly practical. Bringing out into the clear light of observation and experience the isolating and repelling tendency of sin, it aims to show that herein is one of the elements of a tremendous retribution. For in this gradual alienation of a man from his fellow-beings, he finds even now an exquisite misery, and is but anticipating the time, not far distant, when he shall be utterly deserted and desolate, forsaken of God and men.

This dreary prospect could not fail to appall the stoutest heart did it but realize what is implied in such loneliness. But from very ignorance men make light of it. They know not what is implied in solitude. Some of a sentimental cast think it a mild and even rather a pleasant punishment. Poets and dreamers court solitude. They affect lonely and retired places, and shun society. We hear them sing :

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture by the lonely shore."

And some, in their wild imaginings, (which are like the dreams of opium-eaters,) fancy themselves on the shore of the eternal ocean, listening to its desolate moan, not without a certain melancholy pleasure in the sound. Nay, such are the fantastic conceits of men, they almost believe they could wander forever in the eternal shades, nor ask for human society.

But let the most romantic poet analyze the "pleasure of solitude," and he will find that his retirement must have easy limitations to make it endurable. Nature can not satisfy him without man. It must not be a returnless exile, but a voluntary and limited retirement, from which he can come back at will to the society of men. Nature becomes a sublime monotony without man to

give life and animation to the scene. The richest landscape palls when there are no eyes to look upon it but ours. The dreamer of our woods sits there for a few hours entranced in thought, but at sunset he returns to his home, and to the cheering sight of human faces, and the sound of human voices. But let him be banished to a solitude from which there is no return, where he shouts to the rocks and hears but the echo of his own voice, and it becomes a punishment more horrible than death. In that simple story, which was the delight of our childhood, De Foe has described the wretched lot of a poor sailor shipwrecked upon a desert island: "As I walked about in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, the deserts I was in; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together; and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears, or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief, having exhausted itself, would abate."

This anguish of solitude is confirmed by prisoners who, confined apart, find it a relief to see a man now and then pass along the corridor into which the cell opens, or to look down from the grated window upon the paved court where some poor captive is allowed a few paces of liberty. Cut off this privilege, and the cell becomes a tomb, in which the condemned man is buried alive. Then we sometimes find the prisoner making friends with little animals—with the timid mouse that creeps under his cot, or the spider that weaves its web upon the wall, so strong is the impulse of our nature to attach itself to something that has life and that the heart can love.

Let no man say, that he is not dependent on his fellow-beings, that he can live without their society, that he can bear solitude. Alas! he knows not what it is. He has never experienced it. What he calls such is but a brief retirement. Utter solitude is utter wretchedness.

But what we have to fear is, not loneliness of situation, but loneliness of heart—which may exist in the midst of human beings as well as in a desert. If "there is society where none intrudes," so there is profound solitude in the midst of tumultuous life. Nay, a crowd deepens the sense of solitariness. How oppressive is this feeling in a great city, to a stranger who walks its streets alone. In the passing crowd no eye recognizes him. He has no home to

turn to at close of day, no kind voices to welcome him. In all that ocean of life there is not one throb or thought for him. The heart rushes back upon itself, and he feels that he is alone in the wide world.

There is a desolateness which comes from sorrow. How lonely is the heart, when death takes away the object of love. Who that has seen a friend depart, can forget the agony of grief, when he saw a brother sailing far away on the waters of death, and he, alas! left alone, standing on the shore! And then the sense of desolation, as the mind awakes to the dread reality—

"The first dark day of nothingness,"

how does it weigh upon the heart! As the mourner walks abroad, how empty does the world appear. He goes among the living, but he is thinking of the dead. For the time his heart is as unimpressible by outward objects as the marble that covers all that he holds dear.

But after all, this is not utter desolateness. For memory can bring back the dead, and the heart may love them still. And then the sympathy of friends—the respectful silence which they observe, even if they do not dare to offer words of consolation—their gentle tones, insensibly soothe the mourner's grief and soften it away. And more than all, this sorrow is unattended with self-reproach. It is sincere grief. But it is not remorse. Here is wanting the keenest element of woe—the consciousness of deserved suffering. Weep as we may for the departed—desolate as life may seem—there is still an infinite distance between the loneliness of grief and the loneliness of guilt. The veiled and bended form of sorrow, weeping over the tomb, hides no such utter misery as the haggard countenance of despair. No—under the wide heaven guilt is the only thing that is utterly forsaken and alone.

Such is a human being in whom the work of sin is complete—who by years of selfish life has separated himself from all peaceful intercourse, human and divine, and that can find no friendship here, and no mercy hereafter.

And this isolation is to continue after death, and even grow more complete as eternity advances. For man enters the next world as he leaves this, with his character unchanged, with the same attractive or repelling moral traits. A false heart can no more be trusted there than here, nor can utter selfishness inspire affection. Instead, therefore, of bad men coming together in the next world, and striving to be friends as they are companions in wretchedness, they will be yet farther repelled by mutual distrust, and stand apart, sullen and alone. And so will pass their eternal existence, unhappy, because unloving and unloved.

Oh! dark and dreary world! where life is a desert, on which no flower of love can bloom, where all ties are broken and selfishness reigns supreme. Where in the universe is a solitude so awful, so profound? The Siberian exile can support the rigor of his lot, because he finds some companion in sorrow, whose sympathy soothes the pains of his captivity. It is at least a relief to shed their tears together. But to suffer unpitied, with no sympathy from others, and no conscious virtue to support the soul, but knowing that it is all deserved; this indeed is the last extreme of desolation. To see old familiar faces turn away with aversion and disgust—to see them, like lions, go glaring by—this, indeed, is to be alone. This—this is Solitude! Such is a world composed wholly of wicked beings—a vast population, but no society, no love, no friendship—the worst men that have lived on the earth swarming together, full of cursing and bitterness, and eager to wreak on each other their fury and their despair.

Such is the doom of every man who departs from life, an enemy of God. He shall be driven forth, like Cain, from the presence of the Lord, and become a fugitive and a vagabond forever. Whether the state of the wicked hereafter is to be solitary or social, we know not. Perhaps not wholly one or the other. Here the lights of the Bible are few and glimmering. But occasionally a passage darts a gleam into futurity, like a flash of lightning, which shows the solitary pilgrim wandering onward in the eternal darkness.

There is a tradition that our Saviour, when on the way to Calvary, weary and faint with bearing his cross, paused to lean against a door, from which he was rudely driven by the master of the house, and that for this act of cruelty the inhuman Jew was doomed thenceforth to be a wanderer upon earth, to outlive the age of man, and continually to rove from land to land, seeking rest and finding none. Like a shadow has that man since wandered over the globe, passing from zone to zone, flitting here and there, seen an instant and then gone. Wherever he stopped to rest, a voice behind him cried, March, march!

Fit emblem of a guilty mind, haunted and pursued by its own avenging memories!

Thou, sinner, shalt hear that terrible voice. Thou, who hast driven the Saviour from thy door, or any of those for whom Christ died; thou shalt hear him say, DEPART! And from that scene of judgment thou shalt go forth a lonely and abandoned creature. Wretched man! whom that day shall make desolate beyond relief. On, over the great desert of eternity, shalt thou be driven by the ceaseless cry, March, march! And ages to come shall see thee still pursuing thy course of wandering and of woe.

But I will not close with utter despair. Do you shrink from this desolate prospect? Are you even now weary of your lonely

existence, chilled by the atmosphere of selfishness in which you live, and does your heart die within you, as you look forward to a future yet more dreary? Then draw back before it is too late, before the prison-walls have quite closed around you. Abandon the cold, selfish life which has brought you to this wretched state. Unlearn all those maxims and habits which it has been the study of your life to cultivate. The false lessons, the cold maxims and artificial manners of the world—drop them every one, and become as a little child. Give up your false pride. Instead of denying your human brotherhood, own the blessed bond which binds you to your fellow-creatures. Instead of exalting yourself above them, come down to the lowest and the meanest of your kind. Learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and in that humility you shall find an ineffable sweetness and peace. Lost affections shall come back to you, like a returning wave of the sea. Love shall beget love; kindness shall awaken gratitude. The eye that seeth you, it shall bless you, and you shall cause the widow's heart to sing for joy. And while opening your heart to human sympathy, go to God, the Fountain of Love and Blessedness, whose presence is better than human society, whose favor is better than human love, and His infinite tenderness shall lift up your trembling spirit above all sense of loneliness or fear. Then living or dying, you can never be desolate and alone, for WHERE LOVE IS THERE IS NO SOLITUDE.

SERMON XI.

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ABRAM, THE MAN OF PEACE.

"AND Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou wilt depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."—GENESIS 13: 8, 9.

LOT belonged to a class of men of whom we have specimens in all ages, grasping, avaricious, and too much devoted to the world, never satisfied with what they have, always thinking they are in the right, without stopping to criticise their own decisions whenever their supposed interests are involved; always taking sides with their own servants or their own children without investigating the facts; always placing their should-

er to the long end of the yoke when consenting to draw with others; keen to strike a bargain and to figure up the half-penny in their own favor; and as a natural consequence of such a frame of mind, jealous of all others, and even dissatisfied with their own choice, if they have it, lest their neighbor, after all, should get the advantage. This state of mind constitutes a selfish man. The habit once formed, becomes, like all other habits, a second nature, which grace itself does not supplant or entirely eradicate. It clings sometimes to the good man, like physical diseases, even after the virulence of disease is overcome and life itself insured. There are, too, sickly constitutions, moral and mental, as well as physical, the result of youthful indiscretions, early indulgence, and long-practiced sin.

Lot was a good man of this type. He and Abram, his uncle, went up together out of Egypt, both rich in flocks and herds and silver and gold, and they sought together a place and a dwelling in Canaan and the plains of Jordan. But there arose a difficulty, as is very common, between their servants who herded their numerous flocks, that grazed on the wide-extended and common prairie. This difficulty developed the temper of Abram, set forth and expressed in the words of my text.

Abram thought the quarrel an unnecessary and fruitless one, tending only to evil, as strife generally does, and he sought by forbearance and mutual sacrifices to check it in the bud. Abram was a type of another class of men, found also, some of them, in all ages—would that they were more common!—men who think that a penny saved is as good as a penny earned, and a great deal better, because the labor is saved also; who think, too, that a pound sacrificed is better than a quarrel that may cost a pound, involving too the wear and tear of temper, and time, and the danger, personal and moral, always attending animosities engendered and enmities cherished.

He seems to have been an unselfish man who, when he had sufficient, could say that it was enough—"We brought nothing into the world with us, and it is certain we can carry nothing out, and having food and raiment, let us therewith be content—let there be no strife—it is unnecessary as well as dangerous. Here are wide-extended acres—enough for both—choose. If you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you will depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." He was one of those generous men who always have the advantage, for the simple reason that they never seek it. They would rather make a sacrifice than create an enemy, would rather even buy peace than purchase or provoke a quarrel, who prefer to surrender a right rather than do worse, if not called thereby to ignore, surrender or violate a principle, and principle with such men, is not valued by dollars and cents, to be bought or sold—measured merely by pounds, shillings

and pence—but principle involving a violation of the moral sense, of the divine law, invading and pirating on the treasury of the soul. All short of this can be modified, and if need be, surrendered. The sternest, the bravest, the wisest men in the world, are such men. They are not afraid nor ashamed to retreat, if by so doing they can save bloodshed and give time for reflection to make peace. Yet they can make their stand, and die in defense of principle, or deal death to the aggressor. Abram was as brave as he was yielding and conciliating. This was verified in relation to this very man Lot, who became involved in difficulty by habiting with bad men in pursuit of gain, and was taken prisoner by being involved in their quarrels. When Abram, dwelling at peace in the plain of Mamre, in quiet pursuit of his honest labors, heard that Lot was taken captive, he armed the trained servants born in his house, and pursued the kings that had taken Lot into captivity, and with three hundred and eighteen against a host, he brought back Lot and all his goods, and the women also, and the people. He was a man who could say: "I can afford to give an acre of ground, for I shall then have enough left, but I can not consent to have a quarrel for nothing. I can afford to imperil my life, and fight for the man who has separated himself from me, but I can not dwell in peace in the plain of Mamre, surrounded by my flocks and herds and my servants born in my house and bought with my money, while Lot is in captivity and his goods taken by violence." He did not say: "Lot has departed from my counsels, taken his own course, and let him take the consequences." No, he was as brave and benevolent as he was conciliating and averse to strife.

Abraham, afterwards a patriarch and the father of the faithful in all ages of the world, of a preëminence which he gained by his works of faith and labors of love, was now comparatively a young man, of limited experience, hot blood, and life before him. But he belonged to that class so little esteemed in some places and ill-omened ages of the world's history—he was a conservative. He never wore green spectacles, nor put his fences so high that no other man could see over them or see through them. He was transparent to all who would read him, and when he looked out on the beautiful earth, he regarded it all as the world of God's creation, constructed for man's heritage as a tenant at will of the great Proprietor, and though given in separate property to each, yet the common inheritance of all. Hence, he received his erring brother in the exercise of a liberal charity, and opened his generous heart and hand as the almoner of God's bounty to all to whom his large fortune could minister. He was never exclusive, and never a partisan in the common acceptation of the term. This broad basis made him a conservative in the strict etymology and proper acceptation of that term.

No where and in nothing is his liberal hand more gracefully and actively moved than in his large contributions to the service of religion. Apart from the fact that he returned to the king of Sodom the goods of which the conquering kings had despoiled him, and those of Lot also, all which he might have claimed by right of conquest, he met, on his return from victory, Melchisedek, priest of the most high God, and gave him a tenth of all. To the king of Sodom, who urged him to keep the goods he had recovered, he said: No, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet. I will not take any thing that is thine, save only that which the young men have eaten; and Abner, Eschol, and Mamre, my neighbors that volunteered to go with me, let them take their portion." He held, as some do not seem to hold, that all men have common rights under one common Master, and that God has a supreme right as proprietor of all. How nobly did he bear himself, and how gracefully did he acquit the occasion with his kinsman Lot, and before the king of Sodom, his debtor! He voluntarily incurred the perils of war, but refused to enrich himself with the spoils of victory.

Abraham was a man who believed in a special providence, and sought its direction in every event of life, unlike many who lean on their own understanding, neither fearing God nor keeping his commandments. When he emigrated from Haran to Canaan, the first thing that he did was to build an altar to the Lord at Sechem; and when he returned, after a residence in Egypt, he returned immediately to that altar, and called on the name of the Lord. Thus, in his native land, then in the new country to which he emigrated, where temptations thickened and the wicked bore rule, he sought divine direction, and forsook not the law of his God. He planted a vineyard in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord. In the field and in the forest, in the pursuits of agriculture, and amid his flocks and herds, he sought ever the voice of God to direct, the hand of God to lead. Unlike many, then, when God spake he was ready to hear, when God commanded he was ready to obey. So at Beersheba, when God called, "Abraham!" he replied: "Here am I." Four days after, in a distant mountain, laboriously sought, he built an altar, piled the wood, kindled the fire for sacrifice, had taken his lovely boy an unresisting victim, and raised the knife in obedience to the divine command to slay his son. As the old man's arm, nerved by a faith at which we shudder, was just descending to plunge the fatal steel, God there called, and Abraham said: "Here am I." Abraham was a type of a sort of men, unselfish, self-sacrificing and obedient. They are found, too, in every age. They bear the image of their divine Master, who, "though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich."

Character is an inheritance, not only in the prestige of the an-

cestor, but in the spirit transmitted, and we have a lesson worthy of special study in this regard also, in the lives of the other patriarchs. Isaac by his industry, and the blessing of God whom he served, became rich and great in the land, till he was envied by the Philistines. To vent their spite upon him, they filled up all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham. Unlike some testy gentlemen of more modern times, and even ancient times, he did not make it a cause of war. He dug them again, retaining for them still the names by which his father had called them.

The servants of Isaac dug a new well, and found a beautiful spring, and the herdmen of Gerar contended for it. And when Isaac dug still another well, they contended for that also. And Isaac removed, emigrated to another place, and dug another well, and got rid of his troublesome neighbors. And he built an altar there, and called on the name of the Lord. And God prospered him, and his persecutors soon came to him and desired peace. Was not this a good way to heap coals of fire on their heads—better than retaliation, the revolver or bowie-knife, where he who can strike the hardest is the best fellow, and where might makes right? Isaac judged rightly that less labor than it would cost to whip his enemies would enable him to dig another well, and then he finally made them ashamed of themselves, and conquered them by kindness.

So Jacob, when he had become rich in Haran, and desired to be reconciled with his brother Esau, spoke kind words, and divided his flocks and herds with him, and when he came near, he ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him and wept.

Oh! for a spirit of forbearance, of conciliation, of benevolence, of love, such as this, faintly shadowed forth in human examples, even the best, but eminently bright in Christ, the Son of God, who looked upon his enemies with pitying eyes from heaven, who left his seat of glory, and habited with his enemies, went about doing them good, submitted his back to the smiter, and his cheek to him that plucked off the hair; when he was reviled, reviled not again; made no war upon his enemies, though he might have commanded twelve legions of angels to destroy them. Oh! for this spirit in the Church, to pervade and control our spirits, to pervade our country, the world.

There is no more room for war. Swords are beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruning-hooks. Every man is at peace with every other man. Peace on earth, and good will to man, sung on the plains of Bethlehem, brought from heaven, and born in the manger on earth, a germ of the tree whose fruit was to be for the healing of the nations, nurtured with the blood of the Cross, held to earth by the death-struggle of the mighty Sufferer there in that dark hour, bought and paid for and bequeathed to us by the right-

ful possessor. This peace and good-will, thus purchased and thus bequeathed, belong to us, are ours; for the Saviour said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."

Do we dream? Do we theorize? Do we float by a pleasing illusion in the sunbeam, and awake to bitter disappointment? Alas! what contention and strife and bitter animosities, and war and blood and ruin, in the world, made by the angry passions of men unrestrained. But I will retire into the Church, bought by the blood of Christ, renewed in the inner man, imbued with his spirit, a chosen generation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. My brethren, what do we here find? Peace? Harmony? Love? Oh! I remember the words of a holy father in the Church, of record long ago, but I remember his exclamation: "Blessed Jesus! either these are not thy words, or we are not Christians." Let us weep.

But still, poorly as we live, the Church is an oasis in the wilderness of this world, where vegetation acknowledges the rain and the sunshine of heaven, and life is vital. And however low and faint the pulse of that life may beat in many of her members, there are, and there always have been, eminent examples of faith and hope and active benevolence, members who live in, and derive their spirit from Christ, exemplify his religion, imitate his example, go about doing good. They have taken their stand on the rock of ages, and they are now applying the lever which moves the moral world, upheaves all the false systems of paganism, and the false system of the false prophet, and that fraud on the human soul planned by the seducer of Eden, and committed to the administration of the Pope of Rome.

Oh! for this spirit to live and abide with us in our daily intercourse, to reach the councils of our nation and of every nation, to quell the spirit of strife and hatred and revenge and alienation, that all men may love one another. Do I give you a fancy sketch, that finds no response even here? I know I do not. There are those here who have this peace; not without their cares and trials, they have peace. They have no quarrels. They live in harmony with God and with all mankind, and in the midst of the common changes incident to life, "all things work together for their good."

But our world—look at it. The history of the world is a history of wars. There is not, and there never has been, revealed and accepted among men, a principle suited to control the turbulent seas of human passion except that of the Christian religion. If this fails, all is lost. Conventional forms and contracts have failed. Peace societies outside of the Church have failed. National peace congresses have failed. All are like the spider's web. The slightest pretext lights up a flame of war for some ambitious spirit seeking an opportunity. The Church, like the ocean-river

refusing to mingle with the cold and turbid waters through which it flows, has for ages from its mysterious depths held on its course, warm, genial, and rapid, but distinct in its line of separation, modifying the atmosphere above and around, and imparting heat and fruitfulness to continents. If, in this moral channel, convulsions and storms sometimes occur, and are the most terrible, yet they are incidental, and result from the character of the surrounding elements and partly from its own elements originally, and in nature like those with which it conflicts. Grant that, like the storms and hurricanes of the gulf-stream, church conflicts have been the fiercest, this is not the legitimate fruit of its principles, nor should it discredit religion itself; for we admit that bad men are always the worst under the cloak of religion, and even conscience, ill-informed or mistaken, is most impracticable. It is true, in history too, that a professed church, so constructed as to offer a stepping-stone to power, has organized the deepest despotism. But take the apostolic succession as defined by purity of doctrine and consequent separation from the world, and we trace again this warm current of sympathy, benevolence, and love, in storm or sunshine, wherever it flows.

But the history of the world is still a history of wars, and these have usually arisen from causes the most trivial. England and America are in territory the mightiest, with a single exception, of the nations of the earth. One occupies a broad continent. On the possessions of the other, the sun in his daily course never sets. In intellect and learning they are unsurpassed. Yet we have seen these two great nations on the eve of fratricidal war twice within a brief period for a little strip of barren land, and saved only from conflict by a few cool heads, by diplomatic and shrewd endeavor. Even now we are just escaped, if escaped we have, from a third imminent and similar crisis. A little triangle in the frozen north-east corner of Maine, comparatively equal, perhaps, to three quarters of an inch in the north-east corner of your garden, created the cause for the first crisis. Had bad counsels prevailed, the record would have been that of a ten years' war, a debt on each contending party of three hundred millions, the sacrifice of a hundred thousand lives, besides losses in trade not to be estimated, and of morals approaching the infinite. And these dangers to the peace of the world, amid human passions and selfishness and avarice, are always impending and always will be. If not the difference between forty-nine and fifty-four, if not the sandy and dirty little San Juan on the Pacific coast, those who come after us may be called upon to decide by the sword whether Lieutenant Wilkes or Lord Ross first discovered a little strip of land surrounding the frozen south pole, or whose discoverers lay the largest claim to the eternal icebergs of the north. Europe has just come out of a terrible conflict with an increased complication of the difficulties in-

volved, and what is the footing-up? In expense it is this, reliably made: Austria, a hundred millions; France, a hundred millions; Piedmont, twenty millions; other Italian States, three millions; Russia, six millions; England, five millions; Germany, twenty-five millions—making an expenditure of nearly two hundred and fifty millions of dollars, besides the loss of life and productive labor, and social happiness and morals incalculable.

Look at Europe at this moment, armed and arming and fanning the flame of war, thirsting for blood! An eminent French statistician gives the total land and naval forces of Europe at two million eight hundred thousand picked men, requiring for their support an annual outlay of four hundred million dollars. Add to this the value of buildings, fortifications, arms, ammunition, etc., three hundred millions, and the value of their productive labor, such as it might be, in useful callings, two hundred and fifty millions, and the interest of money on the permanent investment, and we have an annual expense of a billion of dollars paid by Europe to support her quarrels.

Now a great deal better and more effectual than all this would be the policy of Abram. If every sovereign of Europe and every government on earth would say to every other: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee; for we be brethren. Is not the whole world before thee? If thou wilt take the right hand, then I will go to the left; and if thou wilt depart to the left hand, then I will go to the right: separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; there is room enough in the world for us all;" if, I say, all would thus behave themselves, there would be no need of soldiers, and Europe would be richer annually by a billion of dollars, and better and happier; and the world would almost cease to weep.

Such a pervading influence then would bless every community. For just like these are all the personal quarrels and legal controversies that draw so heavily on the time and money of individuals in every community. Two men carry their controversy into a court of justice. The probability is, that they both get a verdict against them; for it will be strange almost if each does not spend more than the amount involved before the verdict is reached. Two men meet on the field of honor. One falls by the hand of the other; and with his expiring breath acknowledges, in the light of an explanation till then withheld, that a word uttered, which led to the fatal conflict, was founded in entire mistake.

A mathematical point is defined to be position without magnitude. The causes of the bitterest animosities and the direst conflicts are often less than this—punctilios, little points incapable of definition, and that can never be elevated to the position of a point—illusions that vanish in the light of reason and common-

sense. Abram avoided all such quarrels—quarrels that were causeless, baseless, and base; thus he became a man of peace.

It is the testy temper watching for insults that will find them; not such an one as he of our own times who replied to an impertinence designed to draw him into a quarrel, that "no *gentleman* would insult him, and no other man could." It was graphically said of one of our great statesmen, who had passed peaceably and gracefully through the agitating scenes of a long political life, leaving a luminous track behind him, that "no other man could so severely let his enemies alone." During the recent turbulent scenes in our national Congress, which have awakened so deep a concern in all right-minded citizens, one gentleman from the chivalrous South uttered one sentence to make him remembered, if I mistake not, on both sides of Mason and Dixon's line. He said: "If people entertained enmity towards each other, the true plan was to do as he did—never let it be known." We could almost say, without danger of mistake, that we may venture to vote for such a man.

If any time more than all others in the world's history has specially called for the wisdom commended in our subject, it is now and here in the land of the Puritans and Huguenots, where human liberty, civil and religious, has found a last retreat. If the Anglo-Saxon race, who are an overmatch for the world in arms, themselves united, if they can not defend the fortress, the last hope expires. They said once to their vindictive persecutors in England and on the continent: "If you will take the left hand, then we will go to the right; and if you will depart to the right hand, then we will go to the left." When nothing but submission or extermination would satisfy their relentless pursuers, they departed. This, our goodly heritage, comes to us from them—from their labors, sufferings, conflicts with famine and savages and the howling wilderness and howling storm and tempest. They came with the open Bible in their hands, and taught its precepts to us. If this will not save us, we perish. Henry Clay said, in the last throbs of his patriotic heart: "If the Church can not hold the Union together, I despair of the Republic. Good men must unite, or the masses can not be controlled." Are not the fears of that far-seeing statesman near to be realized?

When we close the Bible, the world is dark. France tried it once, and has suffered the dreadful consequences. When God is forsaken, our own wisdom will ruin us. The temper and candor of Abram manifested in our text, the spirit of the Gospel, would lead us in the path of peace and safety. And let us not think that this is needed at the North only. If I thought so, I would not urge this subject here to-day. Here and now we need to learn and practice the lessons taught in the life of Abram—

not only in the holding of slaves, but in the treatment of them—not only towards our friends, but towards our enemies.

It can not be concealed, and it ought not to be ignored, that this is a dark day in the history of the world and of our country. We need the counsels of men of clear heads, and strong hearts, and conservative tempers. The tendency of all democracies is to rash utterances and rash measures. It is admitted on all hands, that if we can not agree and harmonize, we must fight. And what a war! Let us think. Where shall I go? every man may ask. When my pious ancestors separated for peace' sake from their brethren in Europe, one settled himself on the sandy soil of Cape Cod, and the other migrated to the sunny South. Both branches count now a long line of numerous descendants. The same blood flows in the veins of both. I trace my line of ancestry in the former. But circumstances have placed me in the other section of our glorious country. My children and my children's children are here all. But let the sword be drawn on the issues of the day, and it is brother against brother, father against son, and son against father—not in an isolated instance, but in the masses. Lord, save us from such an issue! Let the North give up and the South keep not back. Let the South say to the North and the North say to the South: "Let us dwell in peace, the whole land is before us; let there be no strife. Take the right hand or the left, and we will take the other. There is room for both and for all." A common blood, a common ancestry, and a common religion bind us to such a covenant. Whenever we retire from these obligations, we are ripe for despotism, and God will certainly punish us by letting us take our course.

The man who neglects to judge himself and settle periodically all his conflicts with others by compromises and the suppression of enmities, by forgiving those who have injured him, and praying for those who spitefully use him, will soon find that he can not pray at all. How can he go before a throne of grace except as a sinner? And how can he pray, "forgive me as I forgive others," when he has not made a clean breast and done toward others what he asks for himself?

In such issues we do not enough consider that he who inflicts an injury has the worst of the case. It may sometimes be best to let our injurer alone, that he may punish himself at his own expense. So did Jacob with the men of Gerar; and it is perhaps the severest punishment that God inflicts on the sinner, to leave him to himself, to let him alone. This, however, he never does till discipline is exercised, reason exhausted, and all overtures have failed.

With the Bible in our hands, this subject furnishes a lesson for daily study. Now "he that is wise is wise for himself, and whoso scorneth he alone shall bear it." Let us read a lesson in Romans:

"Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not. Recompense to no man evil for evil. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." And there is another lesson in Colossians, with which I close: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

SERMON XII.

BY REV. ELIAS MASON,

OF EXETER, N. H.

THE RETURN OF SPRING.

"FOR lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."—SOLOMON'S SONG 2: 11, 12.

AFTER a long and tedious winter, we are again rejoicing in the sweet return of spring. The earth's cold robe of frost and snow has been dissolved, the icicle is melted, the streams are unfettered, and the rude and blustering storms have passed away. Spring, with its sunny hours, its bright anticipations, and its joyous melodies, has come to us again. What a pleasing change, what a sweet vicissitude, a single month has brought to pass! It seems as if the magic fingers of some unseen, celestial visitant had touched our globe and spread new life and beauty over it. The field, so lately cold, and desolate, and drear, in their white robe of snow, are now smiling in green verdure; the spring flowers here and there begin to deck the sod; the forests are just budding into life again, and resounding with the morning songs of the sweet-voiced birds. The cattle begin to appear again upon

the verdant hill-side; the air is soft and balmy, and the gentle dews descend. The seed of the husbandman is swelling in the fertile bosom of the earth; the fruit-trees are beginning to display their glittering buds, and the garden is sending forth its grateful odor. Nature, as a maiden decked in bridal array, is coming now to present herself in all her splendor, and to hold the heart of the beholder captive to her charms.

In the midst of this beautiful renovation, I desire to invite you to contemplate the wisdom of God, by which it has been effected. Go pluck an early flower, as I did yesterday, that blooms in yonder sunlit vale; take out your microscope and examine it. Observe the delicate texture of its petals; trace out its minute veins, and pores innumerable; look at its breathing apparatus; its mechanism for producing nectar; its organs for the reproduction of itself. Consider the elegance of its form; the exquisitely shaded coloring of its petals—the tints of purple, orange, azure, so delicately interblending; the beauty of the sky, the earth, the sea, the pearl within the sea, in one smiling leaf before you; inhale its most delicious perfume. Fix your eye upon it. A day or two ago and it was only so much cold, inert, and lifeless dust; but now the genius, the united skill of all the world, stands mute before its cunning workmanship. It is a miracle, done by that same hand which did confirm this book, from which I speak, by miracles.

Look backward; consider how the seed from which it sprung has been kept alive through changes which no tongue can number, from creation's spring-time until now. What sleepless eye has kept that vigil over it? Look forward; see how the flower will pass to fruit, to feed a bird and make it sing more sweetly, then to earth, and then to bud, and flower, and fruit again; thus ever circling onward, God's eye only watching it, to the end of time. And by this flower, see how the mineral kingdom is resolved into the vegetable, the vegetable in turn into the animal, and the animal into the mineral again; each coming out of each and forming each, in one mysterious round forever.

Look farther still, and see how many potent agencies—how many curiously adapted means and instruments—meet and work together in the production of this single flower. See how the air, the water, and the earth supply their elements in exact and definite proportions for its growth; see how the light divides itself by law to form its coloring; see how the genial warmth of spring dissolves the mold to furnish nutriment; see how the simple turning of the north pole towards the sun supplies the heat—unlocks the grasp of winter, sets the agencies of spring at work, makes the seed spring forth with new vitality and germinate, makes the juices flow, and most cunningly elaborates and perfects the whole.

What an harmonious combination of laws and principles meet and coöperate in the production of a single flower! How simple, yet how complicate and grand! What a framework of natural law meets in it! What harmonious bearings, what nice dependencies! What wisdom we behold in every step of these dependencies—in the adaptation of the air in just degree, the rain, the dew, the light, the heat, the earth—for that is proportioned in its attraction to the flower, as well as the flower to it—the alternation of day and night, the sun, the order of the vast machinery that encircles it—the star, the nebula, the Universe.

To understand that flower, is to know the key-word of creation. It seems a very little thing, I know, and yet to me it is a messenger direct from God. "I come," methinks I hear it say, "I come to you again this spring to tell you of the wisdom of our common Parent. Look down into my smiling face, survey my tinted leaves; mark well my delicately constructed organs; inhale the fragrance of my breath; behold my loving eye; think of my sweet ministration of mercy; see my connection with the most stupendous laws and changes of the globe; contrast the genius manifest in my workmanship with that of your Raphaels and your Canovas, and abandon your cold, earth-born skepticism, and acknowledge and adore the wisdom of your God. I come from his vast manufactory, a simple specimen of his handicraft, to show you that the Maker of this world is worthy of your trust and homage, and to beseech you lovingly to live, like me, obedient to his will. I am but the herald of myriads upon myriads that this spring will bring to you in garden and in field, to preach with silent but with eloquent lips some little sermon on the wisdom of our God."

It is a good thing for us, in these fair days of opening spring-time, to steal away from the dust of the office, the din of the workshop or the school; away from the wear and tear of business, and the feverish excitement after "yellow bits of glittering gold," and walk abroad and breathe the health-inspiring breath of May, survey the verdure-covered fields, penetrate the woodland, climb the hill-side and contemplate the wisdom of the works of God. You will perceive it in the structure of the insect, fluttering in the sun-beam; in the instinct and the voice of the song-bird; in the springing of the simple blade of grass; in the high-towering oak of the mountain; in the lily that adorns the vale; in the cerulean concave bending over you, as in the green robe spread beneath your feet.

You will see, if you look long enough, that beautiful word wisdom inscribed on every object, and the light of Divinity beaming over it, and the voluntary exclamation of your heart and tongue will be: "O Lord! how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all." (Psalm 104 : 24.)

II. Again. In the renewal of the face of nature we are led to contemplate anew the power of God.

A steamboat might, you know, be perfect and complete in all its parts—its wheels, its pumps, its enginery, all in working order—and yet without a motive power to impel it forward, it might only serve to show the folly of its builder. So the works of nature, vast and complicated as they are—wheel within wheel—system within system—laws and principles underlying laws and principles—would be, without a power behind to move them, but a stupendous framework reared for no conceivable good.

But that great Being, who conceived and made the system, stands in person at the head of it and drives with unseen but all-powerful hand the mighty engine, turning with equal care and certainty the ponderous globe that sweeps around the sun, or the tiny stream that circles through the petal of a rose. His invincible energy is operating instantly at every point in his dominions. The foot-prints of his power, the rocks, and the rivers, and the hills, reveal on every side of us; nor can the leaves of autumn or the snows of winter cover them; but in the renovation of the face of nature in the spring they seem to be more distinctly visible. No man can be insensible to this power; but many would ascribe it unto any thing but God; and many, who still bear the name of Christians, are yet too negligent to give honor to whom honor belongs. We are all far too apt to look upon the ordinary operations of nature as an every-day concern; as the natural effect of some known or unknown cause; as the natural and unavoidable consequence of a material law. We say the snow melts because the heat dissolves it; the heat comes because the north pole inclines towards the sun; the north pole inclines towards the sun because the earth comes into a certain part of the ecliptic; and the earth comes into a certain part of its orbit because the attraction of the sun brings it there.

We rest too much in sense; too much in second causes. We do not let our eyes go far enough. We are too easily satisfied with the husks of knowledge. We stop with the shell, when a little more faith, a little more simplicity would give us the sweet kernel:

We do not ask as earnestly as we ought to do, What makes the heat dissolve the snow? What makes the sap arise? What makes attraction turn the earth and bring the spring-time? What is the efficient, what the primal cause of all this mighty movement? What is it which upheaves the molder's turf? It is not law that does it; for law is but an order of sequence, a mode of action. It is but the iron track on which the engine runs. It is a misuse of terms to say that law is the efficient cause of any thing. It is not chance; for then you could not calculate upon another spring-

time; chance is but the unexpected way in which events take place; it certainly is not the power producing them.

It is not progress or development, for that is but a "moving forward," or "unfolding," and not, without abuse of words, the real cause of any thing.

What then is that secret, hidden, irresistible power behind this visible scheme of things, acting so intelligently and so well? The proud philosopher, false to the monitions of his conscience, and disdaining the plain declarations of the Bible and of common-sense, endeavors to account for it by the light of reason; and disowning, in his pride, the name of God, he calls it fate, or chance, or law, or progression, or development; thus covering up the real efficient cause of things by naming the effects or accidents attending it.

The little child that turns its curious eye to heaven when evening shades are falling, and the first lone star comes sparkling out upon its azure vault of heaven, and cries in sweet simplicity, "See, father, God has made a star," has more of true philosophy in his heart, than all the Pantheists that ever breathed; for the power that acts in nature is the power of God. I care not through what agencies, it is still the power of a personal, intelligent God. His strong arm upholds this earth and gives it motion; makes attractive power efficient to lead on the seasons. His powerful hand unclasps the icy band of winter; his busy fingers spread the gorgeous robe of spring. He himself, not law, not chance, not nature, not development; he himself, says David, "sendeth the springs into the valleys; he watereth the hills from his chambers; he causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man." (Psalm 104.)

It is a great and glorious thing to see God in his works immediately around us and to acknowledge him in them. You see him in the earthquake; you see him, etc. It is good and great to see him in the changes which occur beside your very door, etc. Then as you behold this spring, the blossoming of your trees, the germination of your seed, the general awakening of nature into life and beauty, ascribe the change to God; fairly, openly, honestly to God. Meditate on him as ever present, upholding, moving, working, managing, executing all things by his mighty power, and standing personally present by you every moment to protect or to destroy you by that power, as we ourselves may choose.

III. Again. The return of spring leads us to contemplate with liveliest gratitude the unspeakable goodness of God.

He has sheltered us from the peltings of the pitiless storm through the long winter which has past. He has brought back the genial sunshine, the fertilizing shower, the gentle breeze,

the green herbage, the flower, the bird, the bee, expressly for our benefit.

A simple flower, even, is a sweet token of his love; it is a little decorated volume in which are written many words of wisdom; some of power, but every embellishment twined with heavenly grace around that sweet word, Love. A simple flower is a talisman of God's love; for he might have made the world without a flower. A singing-bird, even, is a mark of his affection; for he might have made the grove as silent as the grave. But if we look attentively we shall see that the whole mechanism of the world, involved and intricate as it is, converges to the happiness of man, and testifies to the love of God. And as the rays of light meet in the eye and form the image of the object on the retina, or tablet of the optic nerve, so should these kind providences of God meet in the soul, and form his glorious image on the tablet of the heart.

Let us go forth into the fields, as we find opportunity in this pleasant spring-time, and we shall behold not only the wisdom and the power, but the goodness of God in every thing around us; we shall breathe it in the health-inspiring gale; we shall hear it in the hum of insects, and in the bleating of the fold; we shall see it in the bubbling fountain, in the fresh green robe of the meadow, in the bloom of the fruit-tree, in the sunny smile that gilds the morning of the year; and cold indeed must be our hearts, if they do not ascend in grateful adoration to the bounteous Giver of all good.

"The winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." What a graphic, lovely, truthful picture of the spring. Through the greatness of God's mercy we are now just coming to enjoy its freshness, bloom, and beauty. Let us, therefore, mark full well the wisdom, power, and goodness of God displayed in it. Let us see to it that it pass not by without thus bringing a spiritual benefit to our souls. To some of us this spring will doubtless be the last on earth. The very next may witness flowers springing on our lowly grave.

"Our moments fly apace,
Nor will our minutes stay,
Just like a flood, our hasty days
Are sweeping us away."

Let us examine our hearts and see if we are beginning this opening year aright; if we are praising God for his inexpressible mercy displayed in the return of another genial spring; for that higher exhibition of his mercy in preparing a lamb without spot or blemish, by whose bleeding wounds and dying love, another spring, and life and liberty and hope is given us; and a door is opened into that fair clime, "where everlasting spring abides and

never-fading flowers." Let us so bless God for his merciful kindness, and so live and labor and love, that it may not be for any one of us to say, "The summer is past, the harvest is ended, and we are not saved;" but rather, I have fought the good fight, I have kept the true faith, I have finished my course, I have glory in death, I have been forth to sow in tears.

To be wise men, we must mark the wisdom of God and lay our plans upon it; to be strong men, we must consider the strength of God, and by faith become endowed with it; to be good men, we must have the love of God, as we see it beaming forth in the floral splendors of the spring, as we behold it in the heart-moving pathos of a sacrificial scene, shed abroad in our hearts. To be wise and powerful and good, is to be godlike; and to be godlike, is the highest destiny of man; for all we know of blessedness abides in him. To reach our highest, noblest destiny, then, we must study God in his works and ways; we must believe God; we must obey God; we must imitate God; we must be one with God. Ten thousand bright and beautiful tokens of his skillful fingers, ten thousand charming voices sweetly tell us he is very near us in the spring-time; you see the petal of a rose unfolded, you almost think that you can touch the invisible hand that does it; it is a time to think of God, to study God, to feel after God, to ask great benefactions of him. He is so very, very near to us; so affectionately near to us; so all but sensibly near to us.

When Washington came to visit the North in 1789, the hearts of the people were moved that that great man had come so near to them. They hung up banners over his way; they scattered flowers before his feet; they went to him and bade him welcome; they laid their petitions down before him; they brought their little children that the hands that had gained our nation's freedom might be laid upon them. A mightier than Washington is with us now; the tokens of his love are greater; the freedom he achieved is sweeter; shall we not go out to meet him? Shall we not raise our triumphant songs to him? Shall we not bring our children? Shall spring go by, shall God go by unheeded? Shall the cup of blessing touch our lip and we not drink it? "The winter is past." Then let us shake off the icy bands of sin, and come into the sunlight of God's favor. "The rain is over and gone." Then let the stormy passions which have broken our repose, subside. "The flowers appear on the earth." Then let us pray that the sweet "Rose of Sharon" shed its sacred fragrance on our pathway. "The time of the singing of the birds is come." Then let us sing again our highest songs of adoration, for we owe him more than they. "The voice of the turtle is heard in the land." Then let us hear the "still small voice" of the Celestial Dove, and receive it to the innermost shrine of our hearts, and never, never grieve it more.

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